

WHAT SHOPLIFTING ALSO ENTAILS IS THE IMMEDIATE EXPROPRIATION OF THE MEANS OF LIFE - SURVIVAL GOODS, YES - BUT ALSO THE FRIVOLOUS AND LUXURY ITEMS THAT IMPROVE OUR QUALITY OF LIFE AND AS SUCH IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF THOSE AROUND US. STRUGGLES IN THE LEGAL SPHERE, PARTICULARLY UNION STRUGGLES, ARE DONE THROUGH AN INTERMEDIARY, A TOTALLY MEDIATED PROCESS THAT THERE IS LITTLE SAY IN AND THE RESULTS FROM IT ARE OFTEN FAR OFF. WHEN WE SHOPLIFT THERE IS NO MEDIATION, IT IS SIMPLY US DOING WHAT WE NEED TO DO, WHEN WE NEED TO DO IT, AND HOW WE NEED TO DO IT. THE STRUGGLE IS TOTALLY IN OUR HANDS, AND THE PAYOFF IS IMMEDIATE.



THOUGHTS ON AN OFFENSIVE SHOPLIFTERS MOVEMENT



an invitation to revolt....

linktr.ee/fugitivedistro

fugitivedistribution@protonmail.com

fugitive.keybase.pub

Text by Anonymous

Formatted by Fugitive Distro

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Shoplifting – we’ve all probably done it at least once, many of us do it all the time for survival or fun. It’s probably one of the most ubiquitous crimes, but also the one that the state and their loyal servants in local media, middle income home and small business owners see as the most dangerous, as a sign of the collapse of civilization. Or, that’s how they treat it anyway. From the annoying stickers on ‘alt’ businesses that say ‘go shoplift at walmart’ to self deputized vigilantes who will go out of their way to catch – and sometimes kill – shoplifters to police press releases and news articles publicly humiliating captured shoplifters, a social target is painted on the backs of shoplifters.

We all do it, but few want to talk about it and many see us as the enemies of civilization. Who will come to the defense of the shoplifter? No one, so we have to come to our own defense, and then take the offense. While we are isolated, we are weak. While we are weak, we will be an easy target to pick on. So why not reach out some helping hands, put our heads together, and do what we do but together, with collective strength and intelligence? We are not born weak, we are made weak and as such we can make ourselves strong.

But of all the things we could put our focus on, that we could build our power around, why shoplifting?

Capital, the state, and its defenders seek to keep us isolated, to individualize our misery and by extension our resistance to our misery. The entire criminal system is specifically designed to remove all context, all collectivity, from every act we do. There is no history, no conditions, only us who selfishly broke the law. This isolating and individualizing is to maintain Social Peace, a shaky and largely illusory spell that holds together civil society in submission and a false image of freedom by dissolving collective bonds – and by extension destroying any real individualism that understands we are created by and rely upon

others – and hiding or drowning out in white noise any hint of unrest.

Conversely, the first act of us who seek to break the Social Peace is to make common an understanding that our misery is intentionally produced by this world of our enemies, that it is reproduced by us everyday that we play the roles that are assigned to us, and most importantly that this misery is a common experience that we can relate to each other on. From here, the next move is to come together and turn our individual acts of rebellion and survival into collective acts of offensive struggle.

So, when we are talking about shoplifting specifically we are talking of a particular wide field of struggle that crosses identity lines – a meeting point of struggle. It takes place at the site of consumption – a space we all go through – and both waged and unwaged proletarians take part in and can develop a unified practice of solidarity around. This is important, because when we talk about most other struggles at the workplace (and remember the site of consumption is somebody's workplace) the struggle is solely about the waged workers who specifically work there and the rest of us are relegated to a position of a mere supporter, a spectator. Of course, it doesn't have to be like this but union struggles have no place for the unwaged – the willfully or forcefully unemployed, primary caregivers and stay at home spouses, children, the elderly and retired, the disabled, non-citizens, felons or those of us forced into black market jobs such as sex work or drug dealing.

A struggle at the site of consumption – specifically the offensive organizing and coordinating of shoplifting – encompasses all of us, waged and unwaged.

an extensive amount of help from employees on the other side of the store, or in the case of a chase to “accidentally” get between the chaser and the lifter to impede the chaser. When we see captures and arrests, it is up to us to plant the seeds of solidarity by loudly proclaiming support for the shoplifter and the indignity of the capture or arrest.

FINAL THOUGHTS

I hope people will take the time to read, discuss and critique, and implement this as they see fit. This isn't supposed to be a one-for-one blueprint of what to do but some thoughts to start discussion and begin to formulate plans. The important things here are 1) a primary struggle for the unwaged and 2) a defense of “anti-social” criminality. These can apply to different struggles and it's worth thinking where else to apply it – a few popular ones around the world are fare dodgers and sex workers, some other possibilities could be drug dealers and manufacturers, squatters and campers.

As always, the secret is to begin.

What shoplifting also entails is the immediate expropriation of the means of life – survival goods, yes – but also the frivolous and luxury items that improve our quality of life and as such improve the quality of life of those around us. Struggles in the legal sphere, particularly union struggles, are done through an intermediary, a totally mediated process that there is little say in and the results from it are often far off. When we shoplift there is no mediation, it is simply us doing what we need to do, when we need to do it, and how we need to do it. The struggle is totally in our hands, and the payoff is immediate.

So let's talk concretely about how to organize an offensive shoplifters movement. The actual form the coordination takes is less important than what is actually does but due to security and the possibility of charges relating to conspiracy or organized crime this probably lends itself best to informality. That is, no named organization, no membership lists. Organization is based off coordination between individuals and crews with a respect for autonomy of action and a freedom of association and disassociation – meaning that there never has to be one shoplifters network and for whatever reason networks should feel free to split – whether it's because size makes coordination too cumbersome or some people just cannot work together. Coordination should continue between split networks and there should be a baseline understanding of solidarity that even if we don't – or cannot – work together that an attack on them is also an attack on us – and vice-versa – and that we must respond appropriately.

It could be worth having a specific legal fund that people who can pay into monthly, but again this runs the same legal risks. Instead of a dedicated fund in one place it could also work to simply ask people to put a little money to the side each month and just pool it together when immediately needed.

The most important thing here is that there is a group or groups of people with a unity of purpose and a way to bring new people into the network. The point isn't to have a strong network for ourselves but to expand it to others and give others the tools to expand it themselves. At the end of the day, we should seek to make ourselves irrelevant and redundant.

So then, what does the actual operation of this look like? I think the most important and probably easiest thing is to reach out to and support those arrested for shoplifting. Keeping eyes on the news and jail roster and sending letters or emails to people, putting money on their commissary, paying their bail if we can, coming to their court dates to support them, letting them know they're not alone, building connections with them, and extending an invitation to the network. Ultimately without letting it be publicly known who we are or what we're doing, we should aim to build a feeling that people who shoplift have support.

Secondly there is broader political agitation, creating and putting up pro-shoplifter art in the form of stickers, posters, and graffiti everywhere. Publicly tabling information that is pro-shoplifter, talking to people about jury nullification in the case of shoplifting. Just generally trying to raise the social support of shoplifting and ultimately trying to make it near impossible for the state to find a jury that will convict a shoplifter.

Thirdly, mentoring new shoplifters. Finding ways to pass on skills and getting people trained in shoplifting, watching peoples backs, scoping for cameras, causing distraction, physical intervention in chase. We want to distribute skills and knowledge as widely as possible as well as and just as importantly teaching people how to teach those skills.

Fourth, building distribution nodes for bulk expropriated goods. Eventually we want to be able to pull off rushing a store with a large group of people, expropriating large amounts of goods. But to do that we need a safe and secure way to immediately distribute them. Finding drop off sites or having people who have networks of distribution to people who need things will be key.

SOME PRINCIPLES FOR AN OFFENSIVE SHOPLIFTERS MOVEMENT

Finally, when we talk about a unity of purpose, it helps to have some principles that we can agree to organize around, I propose the following:

1) We must take an explicitly anti-moralist stance in the defense of shoplifters. This means not making distinctions between good/bad, ill/legitimate, survival/luxury etc. Whether its from large corporations or small businesses, for survival goods or for luxuries, to share with others or simply for self-satisfaction or fun.

2) Defense of social war prisoners is a primary site of struggle. Prisons are an essential, non-negotiable site of struggle for any offensive revolutionary movement. It's doubly important for shoplifting and other "apolitical" crimes. They become easily individualized and state and corporate media and propagandists love to publicly degrade shoplifters. We must keep our eyes on the news and arrest reports for shoplifters – make contact by writing letters, bailing out when possible, and offering both legal and emotional support.

3) Solidarity is an action. When we see people shoplifting, it is up to us – whether we know them or not, whether we like them or not – to play the part of the confused shopper who needs